

**ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION**  
**4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012**  
**Thursday – April 13, 2006**

**M I N U T E S**

**Commission Members Present**

Webb Ellis, Chairperson  
Robert Boyd  
Linda Fulkerson  
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Joe Bibich  
Tom Dingwall  
Phillip Quochoytewa

**ADVS Members Present**

Patrick F. Chorpenning, Director

Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner

**Call to Order** - Chairman Ellis called the meeting to order at 10:01 and led the pledge of allegiance. Chairman Ellis announced that Vice Chair Mary Ellen Piotrowski passed away very suddenly (March 18) and flowers were sent to her services. He asked that the attendees take a few moments of silence in her memory. Chairman Ellis welcomed newly-appointed Commissioner Joe Bibich and recognized two guests in attendance: Joan Sisco, President of Veterans First; and Lee Borgen, Veterans Benefits Counselor for the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services in Lake Havasu City.

**Approval of Minutes** –Ken Yamanouchi offered two minor corrections to the March 9, 2006 minutes. The motion was made to approve the minutes with any necessary modifications. It passed unanimously.

**Communications** – There were three pieces of correspondence that went out from the Commission: a thank you letter to Dave Etter for his assistance with the Region meeting in Safford, a letter went to Commissioner Quochoytewa regarding his first term as Commissioner, and a welcome letter to Commissioner Bibich.

**Agency Announcements and Updates**

*Casualty Notification Process* – At the request of Chairman Ellis who had received some inquiries regarding how the state responds to notification of deaths of Arizona service members, the Director, ADVS, briefed the Commission on the process. The casualty protocol is the process used by the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services and the Governor's Office to notify families of service personnel who have been killed in action in theatre in Iraq and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom). The Director described the process and provided handouts.

When there is a casualty and the individual has recorded Arizona as their home of record, the Governor is notified by the Department of Defense. When there is an Arizona connection (such as a parent who lives here) but the service member has not identified Arizona as their home of record, it is extremely difficult for the Governor's staff to learn about the casualty. There have been occasions when the Governor and the ADVS Director learned about an "Arizona connection" casualty from media coverage and not from the traditional sources. Director Chorpenning's staff continually struggles to find information regarding the service member's death and how to contact the family living in Arizona.

When aware of a casualty, the Director's staff works through the Casualty Assistance Officer assigned by the appropriate branch of service to see if the family is interested in a receiving (1) a telephone call from the Governor and (2) an Arizona flag that has been flown over the Capitol. The Director personally contacts the family and presents them with a flag, typically after the funeral services have concluded and the family has a brief grieving period. The Director also contacts the families one year after the death of the service member as a follow up to his initial visit.

Chairman Ellis said that he had received a suggestion from former Commissioner Larry Brown regarding casualties. In Oregon, state government offices lower their flags for four days when they learn of a casualty from Oregon. The Director indicated that he would be glad to discuss the concept of lowering the flag at state offices for 3 to 4 days after learning about an Arizona casualty with the Governor and the Chief of Staff. He also wanted to report to them how the other 48 states handle casualties. The Director will report back at the June meeting what he has found. Commissioner Quochytewa suggested that the Tribes would also appreciate learning about the casualty, so their flags may be lowered on their respective reservations. The Director indicated that his personnel may not be aware of a Navajo service member casualty when the state of residence as listed as Nevada, Utah or Colorado. The Navajo Nation is unique in that it covers four states, making casualty notification even more difficult.

*Legislation and Budget* - Legislative issues under any circumstances can be extremely complex and difficult to track. This is an election year, further complicating things; and Director Chorpenning discussed the current political environment. He distributed three documents:

- Governor Action Items – FY 2007 Executive Budget
- FY 2007 Executive Budget
- Veterans Bills as of April 11, 2006

Director Chorpenning discussed technical (procedural) issues regarding the agency's biennial budget for fiscal year 2006. Legislative leadership was unwilling to allow the agency budget to be opened in the agency's off year, believing that other agencies might follow suit. The Governor therefore included funding issues in her proposed budget submitted to the Legislature (see the Governor Action Items handed out during the meeting). The items were the direct result of the Governor's Veterans Task Force.

SB1043, the bill to spend \$10.2 million to finance construction of the Home, has not received any opposition and the money is expected to be included in the Legislature's budget. Other budgetary issues include:

- Adding Veterans Benefits Counselors to the agency (\$1,125,000)
- Adding other support staff to the agency (\$558,200)
- Provide outreach programs to rural Arizona veterans (a one-stop or "supermarket of services") for veterans in various state locations (\$50,000)
- Replenish the State Veterans' Cemetery Fund so the northern Arizona veterans cemetery can be built at Camp Navajo - 40 miles west of Flagstaff.(\$182,700).
- Fully funding the cemetery in Sierra Vista (\$121,500)

The Governor is strongly committed to supporting these proposals as she noted in her State of the State Address.

Commissioner Bibich asked when the budget would be finalized. Legislative Leadership promised that the budget would be ready by the 65<sup>th</sup> day, and they would conclude the session on the 85<sup>th</sup> day (which would have been March 31, 2006). The House has not started any work on the budget at this time. Director Chorpenning's best guess is that the session will end some time in June.

*Veterans Bills* - Director Chorpenning described the budget process, explaining that bills that include new appropriations must compete with other bills with a financial impact. Even those bills that successfully pass may not be funded – depending on the bill's priority standing for funding out of "the box." "The box" is a term used at the Legislature to describe available funding. He will craft an explanation to accompany any vetoes from the Governor, if necessary, relating to military and/or veteran bills. The Director's explanations will establish a clear direction for the Veterans' Research Committee (which is expected to be established at the conclusion of this legislative session). The Veterans' Research Committee will be able to determine the statewide impact to the veteran community and work to create well-conceived public policy for the veteran community.

Chairman Ellis mentioned that Unified Arizona Veterans members were already asked to help in this effort. The email sent 4/12/05 requested that individual veterans service organization members contact their legislators. Chairman Ellis forwarded the UAV email to all of his contacts to do the same. After the Governor has received the Legislative Budget, the Advisory Commission will send out a letter to Legislative leadership and to the Appropriations Committee members.

### **San Carlos Meeting Held February 10, 2006 – Chairman Ellis**

*Color Guard Rifles and Ammunition* - Tom Dingwall reviewed the materials received from Fred Ferguson regarding firearms and ammunition. He distributed copies to the attendees. A letter will be prepared for Hyde Phillips from the San Carlos Reservation and a copy of the information sent to both him and to Judy Ferreira.

*Vans for VA Clinic Transportation* - Chairman Ellis met with UAV to discuss the donation of vans. Once a van has been donated to the VA, there is no guarantee that the van will be deployed to the location where it was intended. He has requested Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV) take responsibility for sorting out the entire van situation and report its findings to the Commission.

*Emergency Transportation Coverage by the VA* - Commissioner Dingwall provided a handout to attendees outlining conditions under which the VA will pay for cover emergency transportation. During the Safford meeting, Spencer Ralston from the Tucson Medical Center indicated that he would provide information. To quote him from the meeting, "the devil is in the details."

### **Casa Grande/Tribal Meetings May 12 and 13, 2006**

Chairman Ellis indicated that he has not been successful in firming up plans to meet on Friday, May 12, at the Gila River Indian Tribe in Sacaton. At the Piastewa Memorial event, he discussed possibly meeting on the reservation with the leadership of the Ira Hayes American Legion Post #84. They were very supportive of the concept, but Chairman Ellis has not received feedback from them since that time. He may have to stop pursuing this meeting if he does not hear from someone in Sacaton soon. Within the next two days, he will be in contact with Cari James, Inter-Tribal Council, who works for the VA Hospital. Within the next week, Chairman Ellis will communicate to everyone regarding the Friday meeting on the reservation.

Commissioner Yamanouchi will coordinate lodging arrangements with the Purchasing Department, if there is a meeting held at the on Friday May 12. Gabe Forsberg will coordinate staff lodging, if necessary. All Commissioners and staff agreed to drive their private vehicles to the meetings, rather than coordinating a state van.

## **Region Commissioners Responsibilities**

A list of Commissioner responsibilities for their assigned regions was distributed at the last meeting. Chairman Ellis pointed out that press/media contact was duplicated under 5.G on page one of the document. The correction will be made and the list of responsibilities will be sent back out to the Commissioners.

## **Commissioner Information for Directory**

On Gabe Forsberg's behalf, Chairman Ellis asked that the Commissioners submit a short biographical sketch for use on the Internet.

## **Registered Lobbyist Status for the Commissioners**

For the past six years, each Advisory Commissioner had been registered as authorized agency lobbyists. Director Chorpenning determined that the restrictions as lobbyists interfered with the Commissioners' normal activities and he will stop the practice. The Commissioners can always testify in front of the House or Senate as a member of the public. During the testimony, the individual can identify themselves as being an Arizona Veterans' Service Advisory Commissioner. The Advisory Commissioners will be removed from the authorized lobbyist listing at the Secretary of State's Office as soon as practicable.

## **Open Discussion/Good of the Order Announcements**

*Yuma Stand Down* - Bill Thornton was the lead person who orchestrated the Stand Down. Commissioner Fulkerson asked if there had been any explanation offered about why a Veterans Benefits Counselor did not participate in the Yuma Stand Down. She also indicated that she has received queries from other areas interested in doing Stand Downs. Commissioner Fulkerson has not yet received a procedure manual on how to conduct Stand Downs from her contact in California. When she does, she will provide a copy to Gabe Forsberg so that additional copies can be made.

Commissioner Yamanouchi asked if it would be possible to obtain a commitment that the agency will send a Veterans Benefits Counselor to scheduled Stand Downs. Director Chorpenning indicated that he would not provide staff because the VA is in the best position to provide counseling to Stand Down participants. The Director was also very concerned about liability coverage of the event, which must be conducted under the auspices of the VA.

Joan Sisco, President of Veterans First, Ltd., said that her organization has insurance coverage that would extend to cover slips and falls at various events. Liability insurance is a critical consideration when holding an event like a Stand Down, however, and the VA must be involved.

The Director also mentioned the requirement to receive ADVS approval before an organization can legally raise funds to benefit veterans. There is an application form sent out to organizations and Gabe Forsberg will forward a packet out to each commissioner for their files. An extra packet will be sent to Commissioner Fulkerson so that it can be mailed to Bill Thornton.

When the Director is aware of fundraising activities to benefit veterans, he has been instructed to issue a letter demanding that the organization cease and desist until completing the required application process. The organizations must complete the application, register with the Secretary of State, provide financial records, and receive approval by the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.

Commissioner Quochytewa said that it would be very helpful to know exactly what issues the Commissioners can and cannot deal with. The Director indicated that he would have someone forward the laws that govern their statutory authority to the Commissioners.

*Tax Exempt Status for Posts and Chapters* – Chairman Ellis will assume responsibility for this issue that was previously assigned to Mary Ellen Piotrowski.

*Vice Chairperson* – Chairman Ellis appointed Tom Dingwall, senior Commissioner, to serve as the Acting Vice Chairperson until an election is held.

*Veterans Outreach* – On April 29, 2006, ADVS will host a Veterans “Supermarket of Services Benefits Expo” in Flagstaff. This is the first of the proposed outreach programs recommended by the Veterans Task Force Recommendations. The supermarket concept requires participation by various organizations and will provide a comprehensive array of services. The Governor will be there and may need to be introduced by Chairman Ellis. The Director is also hoping to involve all the major veterans service organizations as well. This may be a prelude to holding another “supermarket” in Kingman this August.

*Veteran Organization Directory* - The Director encouraged the Advisory Commissioners to make sure that their veterans service organizations update their information. He also asked each Commissioner to provide a specific point of contact for the organization that nominated them to serve on the Advisory Commission.

**Adjournment** – Meeting adjourned at 12:51 p.m. The next regular meeting will be held on 5/13/06 at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #1677, located at 111 E. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Casa Grande, AZ 85222.